



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

# THE NEW CENTRAL AMERICA

BY MARY WILHELMINE WILLIAMS

DOWN on the Isthmus which joins the two American continents a new nation is in the process of formation. On January 19, last, representatives of the little republics of Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala, and Costa Rica signed articles of union which, it is hoped, will bring about the strength made possible by coöperation and the permanent good-will that is blessed by peace.

The idea of one flag and one government for Central America is neither new nor unprecedented. During the colonial period the five Central American states formed a single unit in the Spanish Indies and constituted the Captaincy-General of Guatemala; and, after having cast off the leading strings of the mother country, they, for fifteen years, were known as the United Provinces of Central America. But the selfishness which marked most of the leaders and the inexperience in self-government which characterized the nation as a whole made this latter period one of civil strife and general chaos. After 1839 the union was legally as well as actually at an end, and the immature, undisciplined states were launched separately upon their stormy political careers. Yet, throughout the long years that followed, the idea of ultimate reunion persisted with a tenacity truly remarkable, and by the end of the last century at least a dozen attempts had been made to restore the states to a common nationality. Though the efforts were not successful in attaining their immediate object, they were by no means fruitless, for through them the leaders in the movement gradually learned that no permanent reunion would be possible until mutual trust and friendship among the states had supplanted selfishness, jealousy, and suspicion, and the habit of flying to arms on the slightest provocation—or without provocation.

With the object of laying a foundation for better relations, the five governments entered into mutual treaty engagements

in 1902. But mere legislation cannot overcome long-established tendency, and in a few years the little nations were in the insane grip of one of the most serious wars that has ever blighted the Isthmus. The situation indeed became so distressing that, fortunately, Mexico and the United States jointly intervened and ended the struggle, and promptly afterwards they brought about the Central American conference which met in Washington in 1907. This gathering accelerated the preparation of the states for the successful reestablishment of the union, for at it several excellent agreements making for friendship and coöperation were signed, and later ratified by the governments concerned.

By the treaty of peace and amity all the states pledged themselves to refrain from meddling in one another's affairs,—a pastime which seemed almost a mania in some quarters,—and although this pledge was repeatedly broken during the ten years of the legal lifetime of the agreement, the treaty had considerable restraining effect, for wars in Central America have not been so frequent since 1907 as they previously were. The plan of the conference for a Central American Bureau fared better. The *Oficina Internacional Centro-América* was created and has performed admirable service in collecting and disseminating commercial and other information, and in fostering international coöperation and interest in union.

The Central American Court of Justice was a disappointment, and, on the whole, a failure. By the Treaty of Washington the states solemnly agreed to settle in it all disputes, of whatever nature, and several cases were thus disposed of; but from the outset there was serious question whether a tribunal unaided by coercive authority for the enforcement of its decisions could contribute much towards the solution of Central American problems.

The actual scrapping of the treaty providing for the court was, however, brought about by an unexpected chain of events growing out of what is known among Spanish Americans as *imperialismo yanqui*—"Yankee imperialism"—manifested in Nicaragua. In order to make clear the part played by the United States in this connection, it is necessary to recall that the abrogation of

the Clayton-Bulwer treaty by the Hay-Pauncefote agreement gave the United States a free hand in Caribbean affairs, and that this government, with Theodore Roosevelt at its head, lost no time in taking advantage of those changed conditions. The Platt Amendment had already placed Cuba under American tutelage, and, following it, the unique diplomacy which gave birth to the Republic of Panama and accelerated the building of an interoceanic canal, and the intervention in Central American affairs in 1907, were indications of the new policy of the United States toward the lands to the south.

Nicaragua, ruled by the tyrant Zelaya, had been the storm centre of the Isthmus for several years when, in 1909, the execution by Zelaya's orders of two American adventurers who had been aiding in a revolt against the dictator, focussed the attention of the Taft administration upon that unhappy state. Diplomatic pressure from Washington was brought to bear and Zelaya was forced to resign. But his elimination appeared to increase, rather than to diminish, the disorder in Nicaragua, and the handful of American marines originally sent down to protect American life and property was, in 1912, increased to an army of nearly three thousand men having the avowed object of restoring order. Subsequently most of the forces were withdrawn, but never for a day since the first invasion in 1912 has Nicaragua been entirely free from American military forces. This is the most conspicuous phase of the "dollar diplomacy," which is but one aspect, in the view of Central Americans, of the hated and feared "Yankee imperialism."

But neither the peace insured by the presence of the American marines nor certain financial arrangements effected privately by American capitalists were sufficient to enable Nicaragua to get firmly on her feet. Treaty guarantees seemed necessary to secure sufficient funds to rescue her from the desperate financial straits in which she had placed herself by her foolish wars. As early as 1911 an attempt had been made to secure such an arrangement, but it failed through the refusal of ratification by the United States Senate. Two years later the Taft government negotiated a new agreement, which gave to the United States the exclusive and perpetual right to construct a canal across

Nicaragua, and leased to it for ninety-nine years the Corn Islands, in the Caribbean, and a site for a naval base in the Gulf of Fonseca, on the Pacific. In return, Nicaragua was to receive three million dollars from the United States. Nicaragua's Government, upheld by American bayonets, ratified the agreement, but again the United States Senate refused ratification.

Undiscouraged, the Wilson administration drafted an agreement which included not only virtually the whole of the recently rejected treaty but also most of the terms which the Platt Amendment imposed upon Cuba, thus making Nicaragua a United States protectorate; in return for which the American Government guaranteed the Nicaraguan debt.

For several years uneasiness and suspicion due to the imperialistic procedure of the United States had been growing in Central America, and the arrangement just mentioned produced actual alarm. It was met with a storm of opposition from individuals and groups representing all of the five nationalities; and the Governments of Costa Rica, Honduras, and Salvador filed with the United States Government formal protests against the treaty. Costa Rica especially objected to the canal concession, for she shared with Nicaragua sovereignty over the San Juan River, which was the logical route for a canal. Honduras and Salvador were particularly disturbed by the grant of the naval base in the Gulf of Fonseca—which is only about twenty miles wide at the entrance—for, since they both bordered on this Gulf, they held that the concession to the United States not only impaired their proprietary rights there, but jeopardized their sovereignty, as well. Furthermore, they asserted, ratification of the treaty would render impossible the reunion of Central America.

How influential were these protests it is impossible to say, but it is a fact that the new convention was rejected by the Foreign Affairs Committee of the United States Senate. A redraft was promptly made, however, and the distinctly protective features were omitted, leaving the agreement almost identical with the second one negotiated by the Taft administration. That is, the document gave to the United States the canal concession and the ninety-nine years' lease of the Corn

Islands and the naval base in the Gulf of Fonseca, in return for three million dollars. In this form it was ratified by the United States Senate, in February, 1916, with an amendment providing that, in view of the protests of Costa Rica, Salvador, and Honduras against the pact, the ratification was given with the express understanding that nothing in the agreement was intended to affect any existing right of the three states mentioned.

But to the aggrieved republics the Senate amendment was mere empty words, and not the safeguard to their rights that it purported to be; and, promptly following the proclamation of the obnoxious treaty—named for its authors, Bryan and Chamorro—Costa Rica and Salvador brought suit before the Central American Court of Justice against Nicaragua on the ground that the agreement referred to violated the treaty of peace and amity made at Washington in 1907. This contention was unanimously supported by the votes of the justices from the four other states; but Nicaragua refused to have anything to do with the suit, and defied the findings of the court.

Though the Court of Justice seemed now to be wrecked beyond any chance of restoration and rehabilitation, its mere existence served to preserve the hope of a united Central America. Therefore, as the ten years set by treaty for its existence neared expiration, an earnest effort, initiated by Salvador in 1917, was made to have the tribunal continued. By this time manipulation of Nicaraguan affairs by the United States had thoroughly persuaded Central American Liberals that only through union could the little republics escape ultimate absorption by the imperialistic power to the north. Consequently, the former leaders manifested more unselfishness, and a new enthusiasm was contributed to the cause by the growth of unionist clubs among the young men, especially in the universities.

All of the states agreed to meet in conference for the purpose of renewing the court and of fostering coöperation along other lines; but, unfortunately, Nicaragua—probably impelled by an influence made virtually inevitable by United States military occupation—expressed the wish that Panama be admitted to the deliberations also. Though they hoped that Panama would eventually join them, the proposal promptly met with disfavor

from the other states, partly because of the protectorate maintained over the Isthmian republic by the United States; but the fact that the five original members of the Central American Union had in their constitutions clauses looking toward and providing for ultimate reconfederation, while Panama's constitution lacked such a provision, was also influential; for Panama's presence at the conference would thus be almost certain to complicate the discussion and minimize the likelihood of a successful outcome. This was no time, they felt, to regard Panama as a member of the Central American family. Yet Nicaragua was firm in her insistence that Panama be invited, the conference failed to take place, and the Central American Court of Justice died early in 1918, when the treaty limit expired.

Following this disappointing attempt came a pause, bringing changes which improved the outlook for the realization of the ideal. The most important of these was the elimination of Manuel Estrada Cabrera, Dictator of Guatemala, whose interest in the proposed union had recently disclosed an entirely selfish character. In spite of his well known enmity towards what we call "American ideals," and notwithstanding the dread and hatred with which his own people regarded him, Cabrera had possessed the friendship and backing of the United States Government, for he welcomed and protected American capitalists; and he succeeded in maintaining his despotic control for twenty-two long years. But early in 1920 his oppressed compatriots, fired by the impatience with autocracy engendered by the World War, revolted under the lead of the Unionist party and overthrew him.

A further element of encouragement grew out of the universal cataclysm. The repeated utterances of the United States Government regarding the rights of small nations gave Central America the hope that, through urging these admirable principles upon others, it might finally occur to the United States to incorporate them in its own foreign policy. An announcement made in July, 1920, by the United States Government regarding the coming election for President of Nicaragua seemed to indicate the desired change of heart. The American Government, the Nicaraguans were informed, gave no preference to any of

the candidates for the office in question, and its sole desire was that the election should be entirely free, in order that the real wishes of the people might be expressed. This seemed to promise that Nicaragua would now be a more harmonious, as well as a more safe and generally desirable, confederate than formerly.

Encouraged by the improved outlook, Salvador again took the initiative and issued invitations to the four sister republics to meet in conference at her capital on September 15, 1920—the ninety-ninth anniversary of the Central American declaration of independence from Spain. The announced object of the gathering was to effect a confederation of the five states, and to revive and execute the treaties of Washington. Honduras, Costa Rica, and Guatemala promptly and unqualifiedly accepted the invitation, but Nicaragua quibbled over the existing status of the treaties in question, and thus caused delay. But the plan for meeting was persisted in, with the result that in December representatives of the five original Central American states began session at San José, Costa Rica, in the Peace Palace given to the republics by Andrew Carnegie.

Like a wicked ghost, however, *imperialismo yanqui* rose at the fraternal gathering and prevented perfect consummation of the unionist ideal. Nicaragua refused to affix her signature to the pact of federation, signed by the four other states on January 19, 1921, the reason given being her rights and obligations under the Bryan-Chamorro treaty. In spite of their well-known abhorrence of the treaty in question, she asked that the other states ratify it in its original form, without the Senate amendment. This they refused to do, for the feeling was strong, especially in Salvador, that no headway toward union could be made unless Nicaragua abrogated the Bryan-Chamorro agreement; but, moved by a spirit of compromise and conciliation, accepted the offensive treaty *with* the Senate guarantee; and, furthermore, included in the pact of union a clause, known as Article IV, to the effect that, until modified or abrogated by diplomatic agreement, all treaties existing between members of the new federation and foreign Powers should be binding upon the states involved. But Nicaragua declared those measures inadequate, and withdrew her delegates from the



conference. Whether or not the United States Government refrained from influencing the Nicaraguan presidential election last autumn, the outcome of it was that Diego Chamorro, who had been with Mr. Bryan joint author of the treaty which caused the difficulty, was the victorious candidate; and this fact doubtless made the agreement loom larger at the conference than it would otherwise have done.

Obviously, the crux of the question is the clause of the treaty giving the United States the exclusive privilege of building a canal. Whenever the United States may decide to make use of her right, another treaty, providing for the payment of many millions of dollars to some Power in Central America, will, of course, be necessary; and Nicaragua desires to insure the safe delivery of this fortune to her own coffers. With the matter left indefinite, the money might have to be divided up with Costa Rica,—who would certainly be entitled to compensation should the San Juan, the only practicable route, be decided upon,—or be paid largely into the common Central American treasury. The Nicaraguan authorities would probably have been satisfied with the reservation of the right later to negotiate independently with the United States with reference to the canal, but this would be disastrous to union and so not satisfactory to the other states.

But from the first the Nicaraguan officials, who were well aware of the benefits to be derived from union, were inclined to be conciliatory, and the hearty approval of the union expressed by our Secretary of State, Mr. Hughes, at a dinner given in honor of the Nicaraguan Minister at Washington, doubtless greatly reinforced the inclination to come to terms with the other states. Hence, on July 3, last, the newly-formed Central American Council was pleasantly surprised by a request from Nicaragua for a statement of terms which might serve as a basis for negotiations looking towards Nicaragua's participation in the union.

It is sincerely to be hoped that this request may speedily lead to an arrangement satisfactory to all, and that when the states gather on September 15 to celebrate the centenary of their independence, there may be five stars in the flag of the new nation on the Isthmus.

In spite of the disappointment and complications caused by

Nicaragua's refusal to sign the pact of union last January, there has been steady progress towards constructing the machinery of the federation; for the votes of three states were sufficient to make the new nation a reality. With the preliminary agreement as a basis, a constitution has been drawn up providing for a federation of autonomous states, with legislative, executive, and judicial departments, which, to avoid jealousies, shall have their seat in a Federal District, to be created. Meanwhile, the place of meeting is Tegucigalpa, Honduras. The most interesting clause of the constitution stipulates that there shall be an Executive Council, similar to that of Switzerland, instead of a single executive. The members of this Council are to be elected for five years, and shall choose from their number a President, whose term, however, is limited to one year, with prohibition against immediate reëligibility. These restrictions seem to offer excellent assurance against the wrecking of the federation through usurpation of power by the executive—one of the most common evils in Spanish American politics.

The importance of recent developments on the Isthmus becomes manifest only when it is realized that the completed federation will be fifth in population among the independent nations of the Western World; and, yet, as compared with England—which has but two-sevenths as large an area with seven times the population—it is an empty country. The establishment of peace and financial security will surely invite a great flood of immigration, for in natural resources Central America is one of the richest regions in the world, and her proximity to the Panama Canal affords her tremendous commercial advantages.

Will the United States Government respond to the challenge offered by the situation?

MARY WILHELMINE WILLIAMS.